2020 Spotlight Jazz Semifinal Panel

Ryan Dragon is a trombonist and a fixture on the LA jazz and studio scenes and avant-garde community. He attended the Berklee school of music and performed with Cirque du Soleil. Known for his virtuosity and distinctive approach to improvisation, Dragon has contributed his playing live and on recordings with Herbie Hancock, Quincy Jones, The Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, John Legend, Usher, Gwen Stefani, Imagine Dragons and Panic at the Disco. Film score credits include soundtracks for Crazy Rich Asians, Ice Age 5, Money Monster. His playing and soloing can be heard on multiple Grammy nominated albums with Gordon Goodwin’s Big Phat Band and John Beasley’s MONK’estra. Dragon is on the faculty at the Herb Alpert School of Music at Cal Arts.

David Hughes was born and raised in Sweden and studied at Royal College of Music in Stockholm and Bass Institute of Technology, BIT in Hollywood. He soon joined the teaching staff at BIT. His first big break came after Wayne Henderson of the Jazz Crusaders asked Hughes to join the band. He has performed or recorded with such artists as Dav Koz, Patti Austin, Angela Bofill, Chaka Khan, Melissa Etheridge and Burt Bacharach, as well as countless sessions for TV and films. Hughes has recorded four solo CDs featuring his bass playing, composing, arranging and producing. Currently Hughes tours with Christopher Cross, David Benoit, and his company Music With View.

Tom Luer, saxophonist, has performed with Poncho Sanchez, the Gordon Goodwin Big Phat Band, Wayne Bergeron Big Band, and the Toshiko Akiyosi/Lew Tabackan West Coast Reunion Band, among others. He has toured with Queen Latifah and his television appearances include the American Music Awards, the Tonight Show with Jay Leno, and the Ellen DeGeneres show. He recently released his debut recording, and recording appearances include the Mike Barone Big Band “Flight of the Bumblebee”, Curt Berg and the Avon St. Quintet “At Stagg St. Studio”, and on Paul Tynan and Aaron Lington’s “Bicoastal Collective”. He serves on the faculty at Cal Poly Pomona where he teaches Jazz Saxophone Jazz Improvisation and Jazz History. His additional teaching experience includes faculty positions at the University of North Texas, Texas Christian University and Bethel College.

Otmaro Ruiz is a Grammy nominated Venezuelan pianist, keyboardist, composer and arranger. Regarded as one of the most sought-after keyboardists for recordings in today’s scene, Mr. Ruiz is still able to dedicate time to teaching, scoring of movie sound-tracks and to the production of his works as a leader with original compositional material, captured in the CDs Otmaro Ruiz plays Ryuichi Sakamoto, Distant Friends, Nothing to Hide, Latino and Sojourn. He has performed or recorded with Alex Acuña, Justo Almaro y Abraham Laboriel, Dianne Reeves, John McLaughlin, Tito Puente, Arturo Sandoval, John Patitucci, Paquito D’Rivera, Jing Chi, Nana Caymmi, Dori Caymmi, Akira Jimbo, Frank Gambale, Peter Erskine, David Weckl, Art Davis Quintet, Charlie Haden Liberation Music Orchestra, Alain Caron, Gino Vannelli, Tolu, Frank Morgan, Robben Ford, Vinnie Colaiuta and Jon Anderson Currently, Otmaro is a Jazz Piano Faculty at USC and Shepherd University School of Music.

Jamey Tate has performed with Grammy nominees/winners and Billboard chart toppers including Al Jarreau, Quincy Jones, The New York Voices, The Stan Kenton Orchestra, John Daversa’s Big Band, Ron King’s Big Band, Chris Walden, Renee Olstead, Patrick Williams, Russell Ferrante, Mindy Abair, Melissa Manchester, and Kurt Elling. His playing has also been featured on albums by David Benoit and The Stan Kenton Band, to name a few. Tate has produced artists such as Selina Albright, The Edge Effect and Justin Ray. He is a regular clinician at the Crossroads School Summer Jazz Program, and served as an instructor at USC, Crossroads School, Don Bosco Technical Institute, and Warren High School. He is an artist/clinician with Yamaha Drums, Zildjian Cymbals, Gen-16 Acoustic/Electric Cymbals, Remo Drumheads, and Vic Firth drumsticks.